

What came before the Modern Era?

A Brief History of Western Thought

Feudalism: What was it?

- A **political, social, and economic** system that was the predominant means of organization in **Europe** during the **Middle Ages** (500-1500 AD/CE)
- Similar systems have existed in other places in other time periods – e.g. Feudal Japan (Shogunate), *hacienda* system in the Spanish colonial empire – and has some similarities to areas today controlled by “warlords”

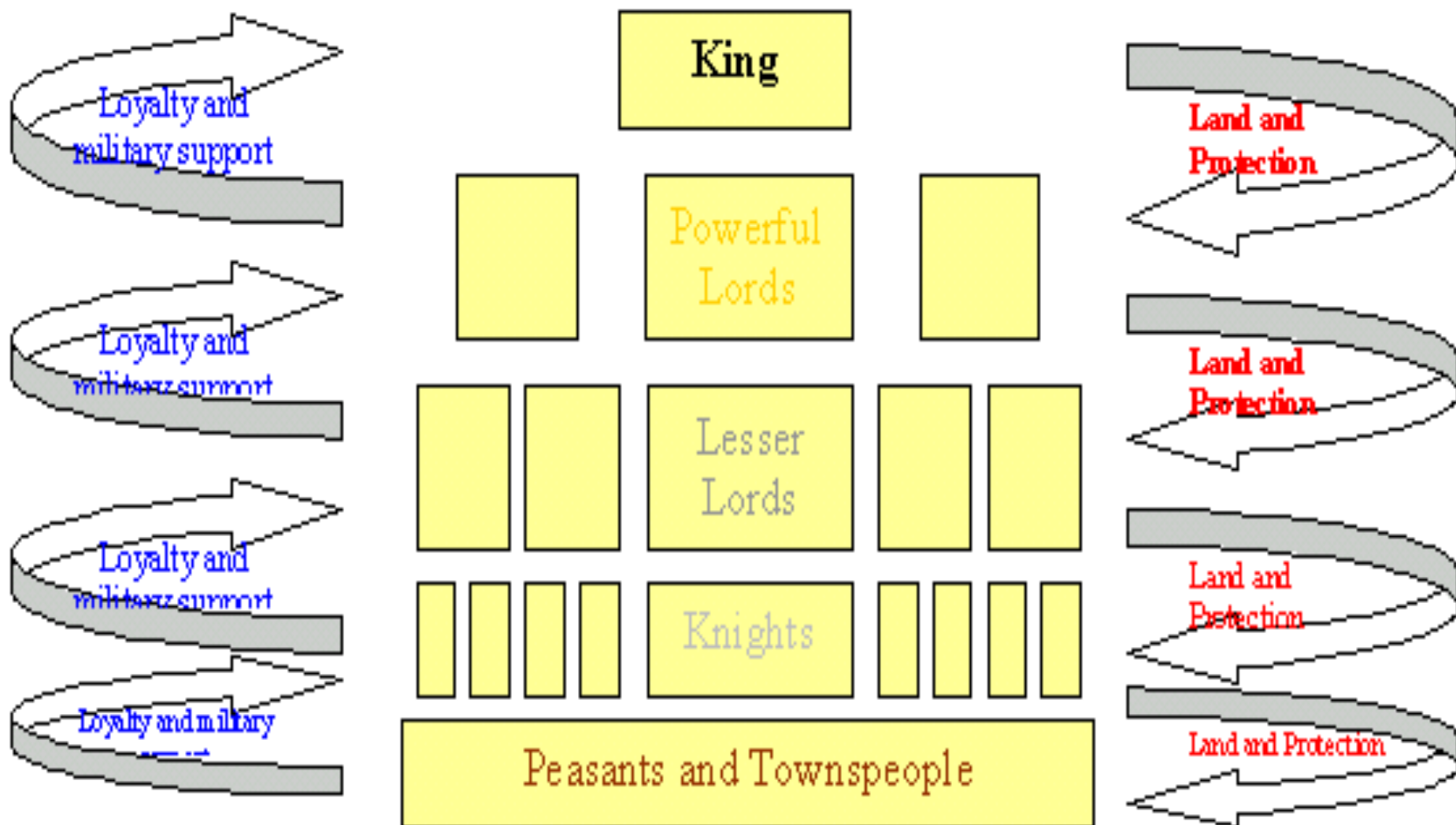
Reasons for the Rise of Feudalism

- Need for protection
 - Central governments were too weak to protect all subjects from invaders. Citizens surrendered lands to local noble in exchange for promise of protection.
- Land Policy of Kings
 - Rulers granted landed estates to the important nobles in return for pledges of military assistance.

Feudalism as a Political System

- Weak Central Government
 - Although Kings technically controlled entire kingdoms, they couldn't really exercise authority beyond royal domain.
- Strong Local Government
 - With weak King, local nobles controlled their territory. Nobles made laws, levied taxes, dispensed justice, and waged war.

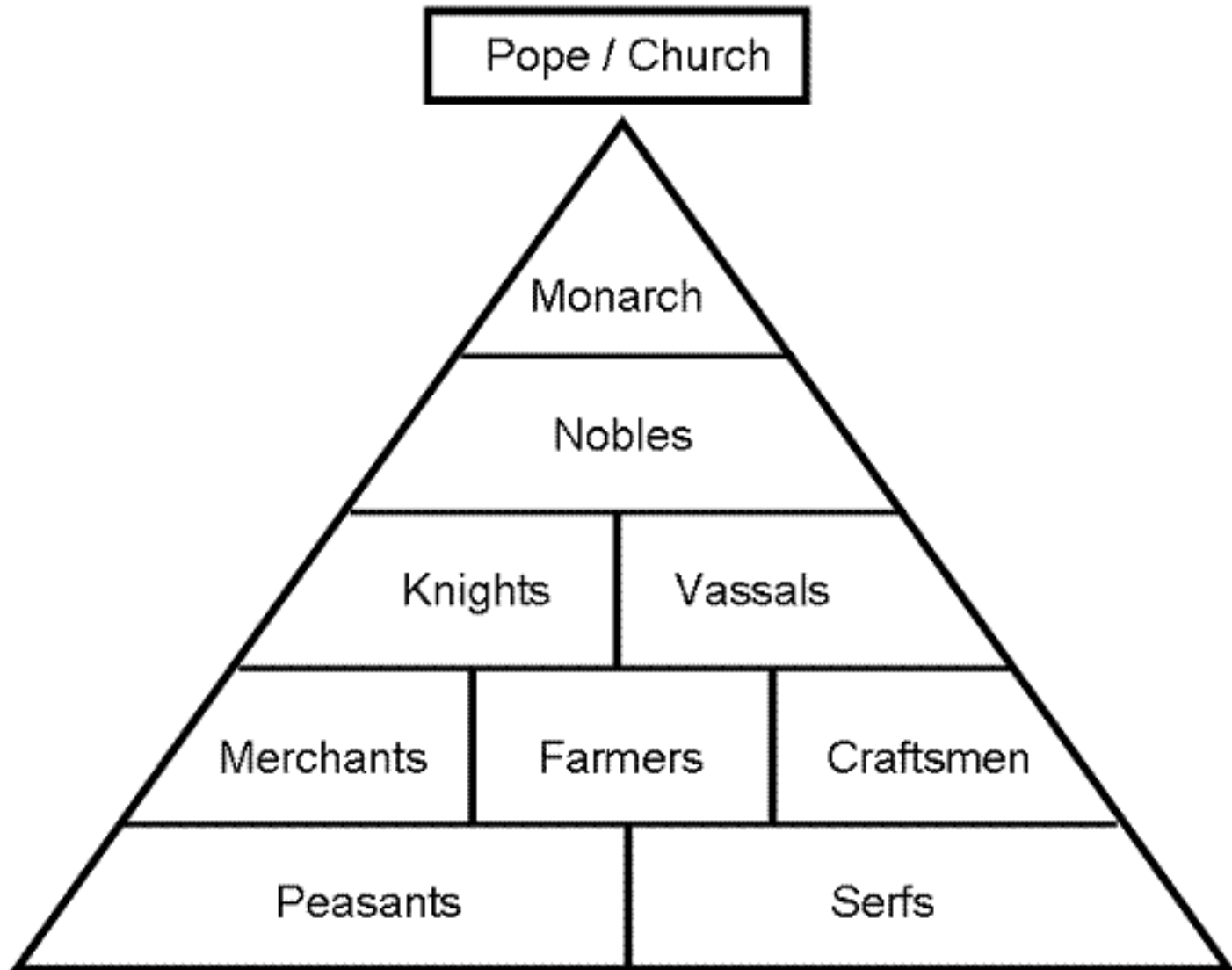
Feudal Hierarchy & Obligations



Feudalism as a Social System

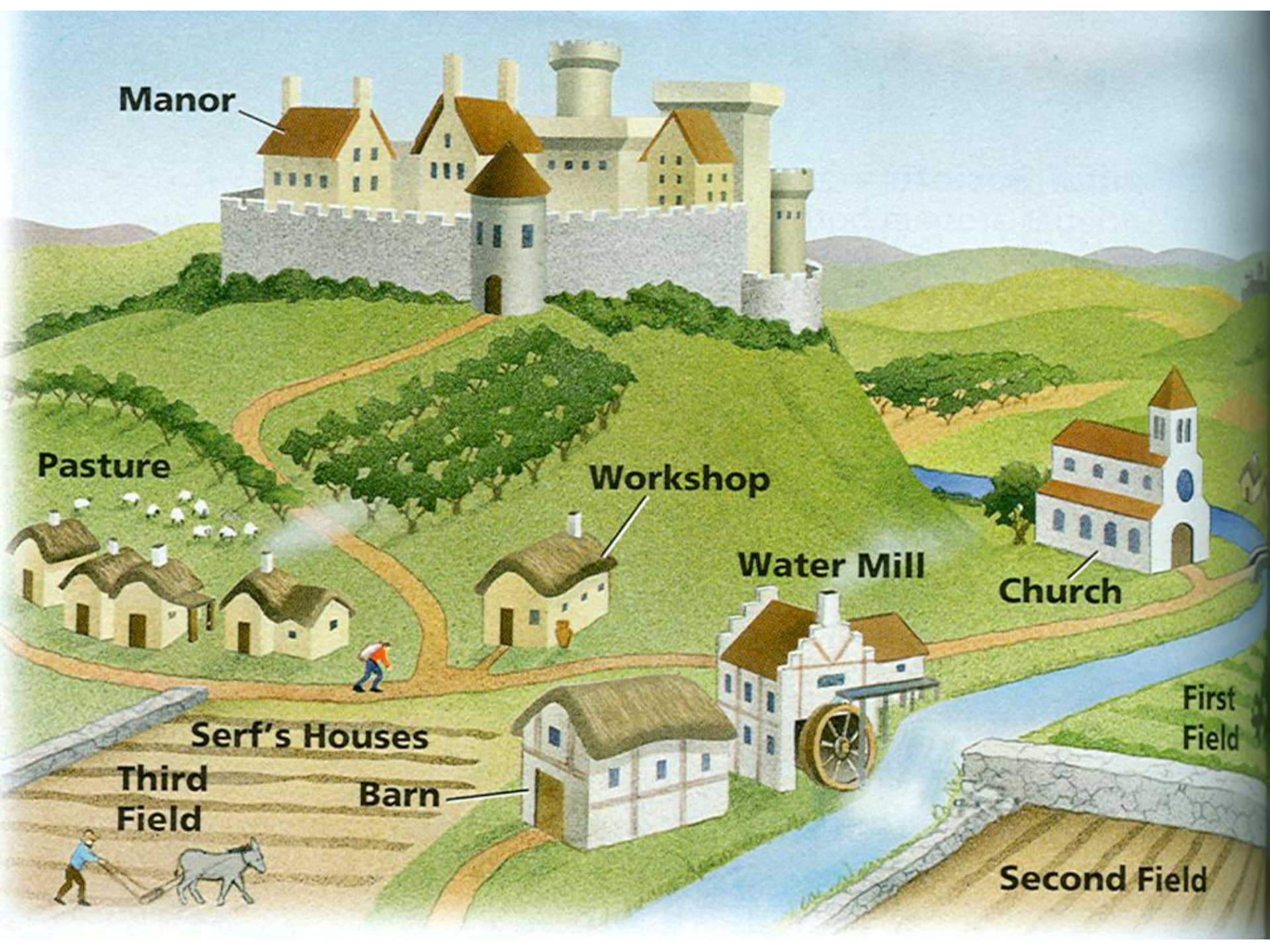
- Rigid class distinctions
 - Feudal society sharply divided into:
 - Land-holding nobles (aristocracy, upper class)
 - Great mass of peasants (lower class, serfs)
 - Position determined by birth
 - Serfs had legal restrictions on their freedom
- Complicated Lord-Vassal Relationships
 - When lesser lords received fiefs from different higher lords, they were vassals to several lords. Primary Allegiance led to disputes
- Titles and obligations were inherited (primogeniture)

The Feudal Social Pyramid



Feudalism as an Economic System

- Self-sufficient Agricultural Manor
 - The farm, the lord's castle and village buildings
 - Lord dictates the activities and production levels
 - Serfs provided the labor
 - Not exactly enslaved but not free
 - Legally bound to the land they worked
 - Paid “rent” with labor or crops
 - Impoverished life
- Very little trade between manors
- Limited use of money



Manor

Pasture

Workshop

Water Mill

Church

Serf's Houses

Third Field

Barn

First Field

Second Field

Pre-Modern Thought in the Middle Ages

- Feudalism was a stable system, but it didn't promote much advancement in thought
 - Lack of trade restricted new ideas
 - Constant warfare
 - No social mobility discouraged education
 - Knowledge was based on **tradition** and **superstition**
 - Roman Catholic Church discouraged new theories
 - Knowledge from Classical Greece and Rome was “lost” to Western Europe (Islamic Empires were more advanced)

Why did Feudalism decline?

- Crusades
 - Religious wars to reclaim holy land from Muslims
 - Weakened economic basis by awakening demand for Eastern goods. Towns grew and serfs fled to cities.
- Rise of National States and Absolute Monarchy
 - Central Governments gradually regained power

Entering the Modern Era

- 3 major “Movements of Thought” would bring Europeans closer to the kinds of ideas that we might begin to consider “modern”:
 1. The Renaissance
 2. The Protestant Reformation
 3. The Scientific Revolution